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JARS FROM THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BC AT SIDON (SOUTH LEBANON): A STANDARDIZED PRODUCTION IN THE EMERGENCE OF AN URBAN CULTURE

Sidon was one of the most important cities of the ancient Canaanite & Phoenician peoples. However, like other places in modern Lebanon, most of what we knew of its history came from the written records of other ancient contemporary cultures, namely Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Greek. Furthermore, a major obstacle to excavating the ancient city was modern Sidon, which lies above the ancient remains. However, due to the propitious acquisition of three downtown sites by the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities in the early sixties, access to the ancient layers of the city became possible.

In 1998 permission was granted by the Lebanese Department of Antiquities for a British team to begin archaeological excavation[1] of the ancient city of Sidon. This was made possible through grants from the British Museum, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Lebanese private institutions (the Hariri Foundation, Byblos bank and Nokia, Lebanon). Two new British sponsors namely the British Academy and the Council for British Research in the Levant participated in funding the 2002 season of excavation. The site has already revealed a number of important discoveries not least of which is the establishment for the first time of a pottery chronology for the Lebanon.

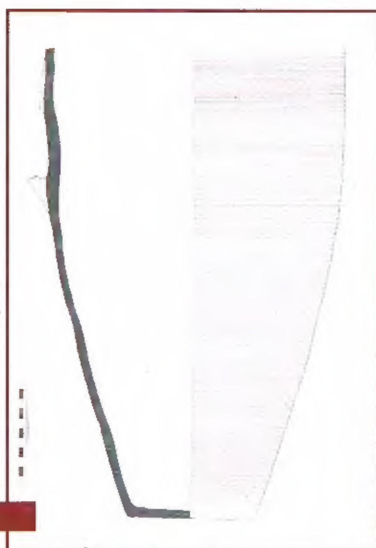
Sidon the port city also called "Sidon Land by the sea" or little Sidon, included the huge mound or "tell" on which the ruins of a Crusader castle, the "Castle of St Louis", sits. The British Museum excavations are close to this castle and the first trenches of the excavations were begun in the mediaeval ditch originally dug during the building of the castle and its fortifications.

The excavation team members included: Dr John Curtis, Keeper of the Department of the Ancient Near East at the British Museum, Special Advisor to the excavation, Sarah Collins from the same

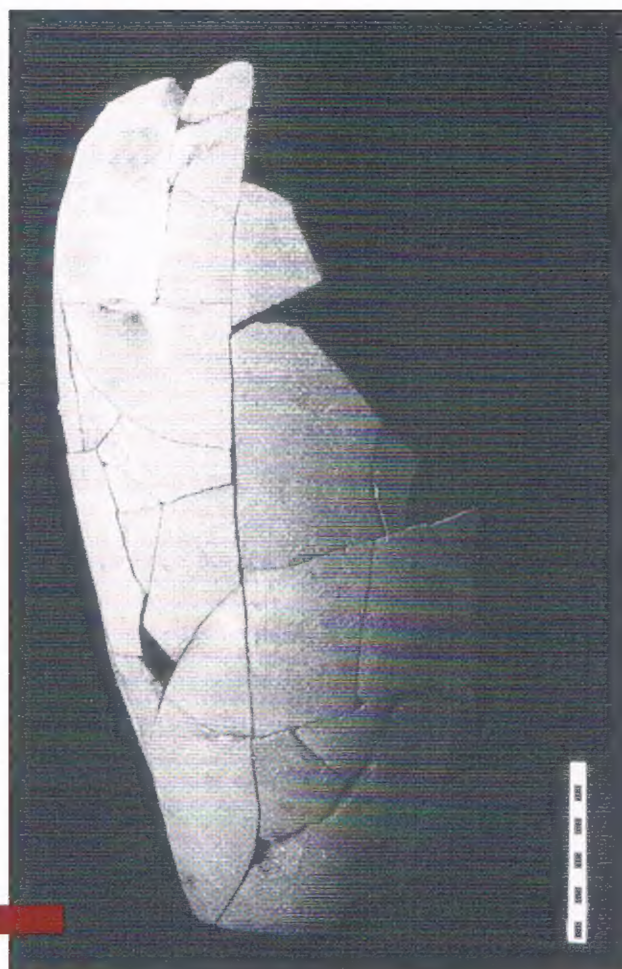
1 Pottery and artefacts uncovered at Sidon underwent conservation treatment. This was undertaken by Isabelle Skaf, Christine Matar and Badr Jabbour Gedeon.

2 Preliminary reports refer to this stratum as stratum 6.

Drawings by Norma Sfeir.



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department, Rod Brook, free lance archaeologist (1998-2000-2001), Jonathan Crisp (2002), Dr Dafydd Griffiths, Ceramic petrologist, University College London, Hugh Barnes (surveyor), James Osborne from Toronto University and a team of students from the Lebanese University at Sidon. Six Early Bronze Age levels of occupation were identified from surface to bedrock (Doumet-Serhal 1998-1999, 2000 & forthcoming). Diagnostic sherds found on the bedrock (which is stratum 1[2]) are reminiscent of the Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age I tradition.

Various types of third millennium BC jars were found namely the slender egg-shaped jar and the more common hole-mouth jar.

Repertoire

A two-handled slender egg-shaped jar (fig.1-2).

A two-handled slender egg-shaped jar with a narrow flat base (S/1508) 52 cm high, was found (Mazzoni 1987, 145). It had combed decoration on the outer surface resulting in plain horizontal bands in relief. It shows, in shape and decoration, close parallels with the jars from Gizah dating to the V - IV Dynasties (2613- 2345 BC) (Mazzoni 1987, 147). On a morphological basis Sidon's jar is also comparable to a Fourth Dynasty jar (14406) from Byblos that bears only horizontal combing (Mazzoni 1987, 149). Other jars of similar shape but with more complex patterns are found in Egypt during the Sixth Dynasty. According to Mazzoni (1987, 145), these jars were used to keep or carry oils. The jars from the necropolis of Gizah in Egypt contained residual contents that were identified as being a dried resinous substance.

Jar fragments found at Sidon bear the applied trade-mark symbol of the ram's head (fig. 9 & 10) which compares to jars from Byblos, Palestine and Gizeh (Fourth Dynasty).

The hole-mouth jar.

The hole-mouth jar, the most common standardized category of mass production jars is generally made of a coarse reddish-brown heavy ware (for fabrics see Griffiths 1999, 49-55).

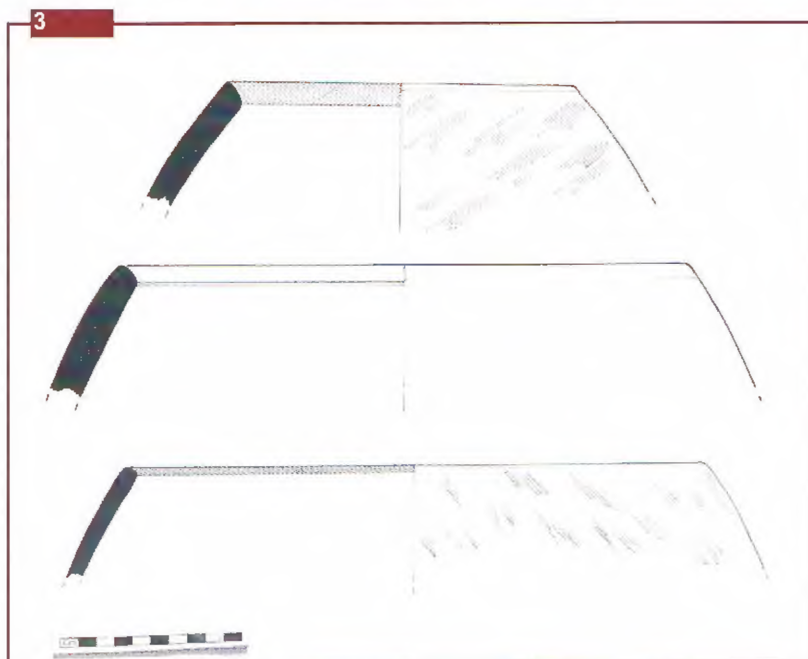
These hand-made globular jars are only truncated at the top hence "the hole-mouth" (Amiran 1978 48). A notable feature however of those found in Sidon is that they are not like those found in Palestine of the same period (Joffe 1991, 247) but rather seem to be descended from contemporary Syrian examples whilst at the same time remaining unique. Sidon's hole-mouth jars are an expression of cultural identity and have a special bearing on the discussion of contacts and influences between Syria and Palestine.

Rim shapes include the following:

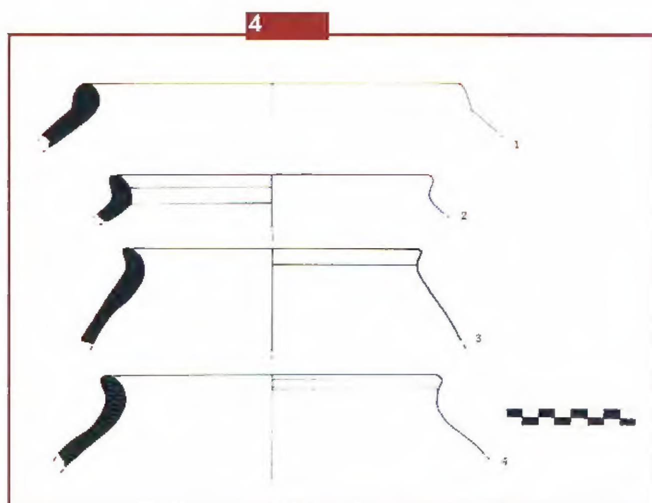
Stratum 1 (Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age I) (fig. 3).

- Only three square cut rims were found at Sidon. They are similar to a family of rim forms found at Jericho (Kenyon & Holland, 1982, fig. 39, 21 Proto-urban Period), Arad (Amiran, 1978, pl. 8, 12, 15, str. IV, EB I), Ai (Callaway, 1972, fig. 15, 9, p. 61, " ...the hole-mouth jar with squared rim belongs in a family beginning at Jericho in Proto Urban B", Callaway, 1980, fig. 37, 19 (Phase II pre-urban 3100-3000) and Tell el-Farah north (De Vaux, 1961, fig. 3: 14-16 assigned to period 1 of the Early Bronze Age).

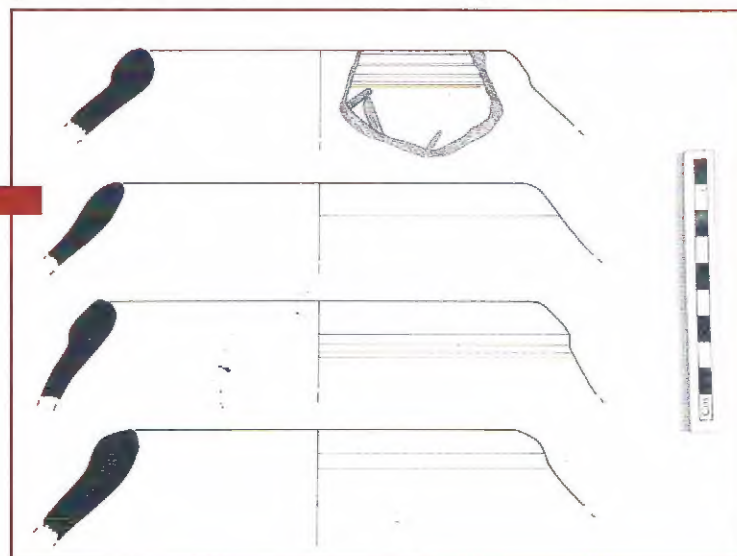
1-2 Egg shaped jar with a capacity of approximately 25 litres
3 Hole-mouth jars from stratum 1



Stratum 3 & 4 (Early Bronze Age II A & B) (fig. 4).
One category of hole-mouth jars found in Sidon at stratum 3 onwards has a very short heavy upright rounded rim which gives the impression of a very short stub neck comparable to jars from Hama, Ebla (Mardikh II B 1; Mazzoni, 1985 a, 6, fig. 5, 4, 9; fig. 7, 9*) and Ta'yinat phase I (Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, 399, fig. 305, 5, phase I, large jars like fig. 305, 5 are not common in phase H).


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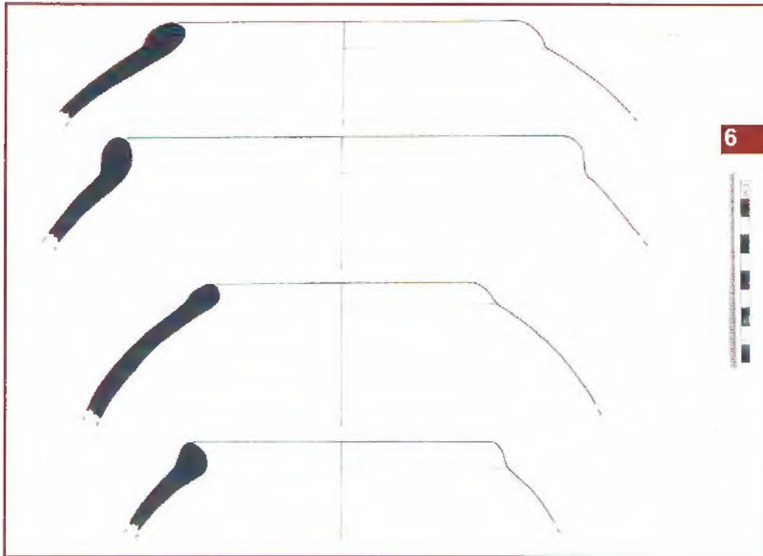
- **Strata 5 and 6 (Early Bronze Age III A & B)** (fig. 5 & 6).
- Rims are plain and rounded, thickened, beveled, or grooved. There are also variant rim forms in this category, namely bulbous rims comparable to jars from Tell Arqa (Thalmann, 2000, fig. 24 a, phase R, EB III) in North Lebanon, Syria, Ebla (Mardikh II B 1, Mazzoni, 1985, fig. 5, 4, 9, p. 6; fig. 7, 9) Hama and Tell Sweyhat. The rim diameters range from 13 to 26 cm. Hole-mouth vessels with short stub neck are still popular. A variant of this rim is the upright rim with a broad flange comparable to jugs from the Amuq region. Some vessels have an everted rim comparable to cooking pots. Other have a bulbous folded-over rim.


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Distinctive horizontal multiple grooving appears on the surface of the vessel as well as combing below the rim.
The grooving (fig. 11) is very characteristic of that found on cooking pots or jugs of the EB III in Syria, namely at Ebla (Mazzoni, 1985, 6, fig. 5, 5, 9), Ras Shamra (Courtois, 1962, 437, fig. 25, H, Ugarit Ancien III), Hama (Fugmann, 1958, 53, fig. 58, 3F 183, level J, and 56, fig. 3K 307 level, J, second half of the third millennium) and Tell Sianu (Bounni & Maqdissi, 1994, fig. 3, 15, EB III). According to Holland (Holland, 1980, 128, type A of comb-incised ware) the homeland of this type of decoration is thought to be either in north-western Syria or northern Mesopotamia, west of the upper Euphrates valley. One vessel is decorated with vertical incisions applied below the neck. Such a decorative motif is considered an EBIII revival of a decorative mode found in Late Chalcolithic /EBI (Dever & Richard 1977, 7).

Conclusion

The most serious limitation in studying trade in the third millennium BC is the total absence of written documents (Ben-Tor 1986, 1-2). The discussion of the emergence of an urban civilization is almost exclusively based on pottery and in the Sidon case, it is represented by the increase of a particular type of vessel, namely the hole-mouth jar. This same jar, through an analysis of percentages, constitutes an indication of a systematic production (fig. 7). The end of the third millennium BC (EB III A & B) is marked by a sharp increase in the size of the population (fig. 8, for the total of body sherds) and the density of settlement (Doumet-Serhal, 2003 forthcoming). This together with the standardized production of hole-mouth jars, reflects the emergence of an urban culture.

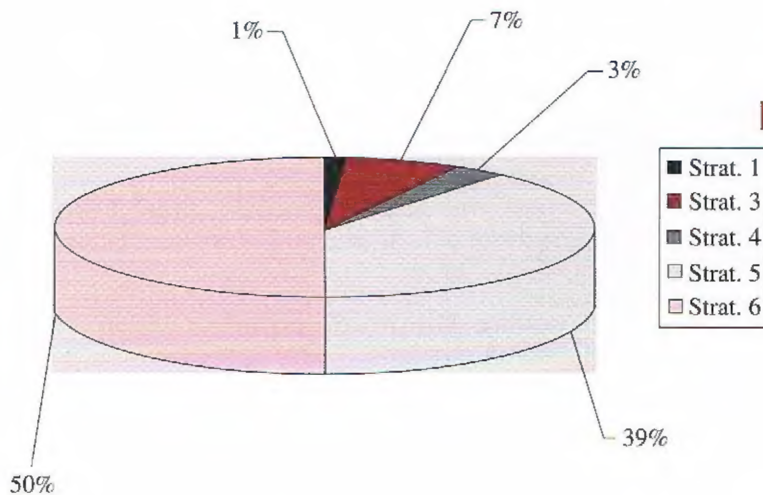


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A pie chart of hole-mouth in each stratum



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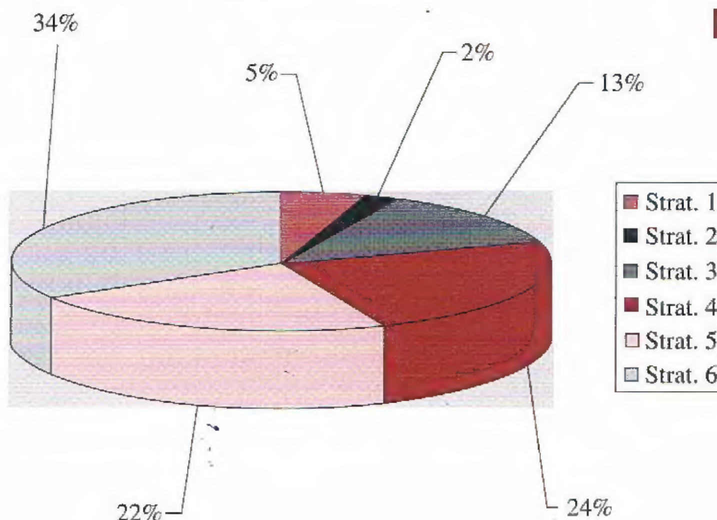


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Body shreds by m³



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4	Hole-mouth jars from Early Bronze Age II A-B
5-6	Hole-mouth jars from Early Bronze Age III A-B
7	Hole-mouth in % in each stratum
8	% of body sherds by m³
9-10	Applied ram's head on jar fragments
11	Hole-mouth jar from Early Bronze Age III A with horizontal multiple grooving

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